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discussed the whole question with leading experts on European and military affairs. In this book he examines the proposals so far put forward and assesses the chance of any lasting settlement being reached.

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A PENGUIN SPECIAL

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DISENGAGEMENT IN EUROPE

MICHAEL HOWARD



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Foreword

by the Rt Hon. F. J. Bellenger, M.P.

former Secretary of State for War

EARLY in 1957 a few of us met together and discussed what we meant by 'Disengagement', that blessed word which has been bandied about by all and sundry like the word Mesopotamia was in the First World War.

None of us could agree on a precise definition, so we thereupon decided to form a Study Group to investigate what it really signified and what are its implications so far as the Western Allies are concerned.

Arising out of this meeting, the following individuals took part in most of our deliberations, under my Chairmanship:

The Hon. Alastair Buchan, Defence Correspondent of the *Observer*.

Captain Eugen Hinterhoff, Hon. Secretary of the Military Commentators Circle.

Michael Howard, M.C., Lecturer in War Studies, University of London King's College.

Sir James Hutchison, Bt., D.S.O., M.P., President Western European Union Assembly. Formerly Under Secretary of State for War. Conservative M.P. for Scotstoun.

Air Vice-Marshal E. J. Kingston McCloughry, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., D.F.C., one time Chief Air Defence Officer, Ministry of Defence; author of *War in Three Dimensions*, *The Direction of War*, etc.

J. M. Mackintosh, British Liaison Officer with Soviet Armies in South-Eastern Europe 1944-6. Author of several works on the Soviet Armed Forces.

Foreword

General Sir John Whiteley, C.B.E., K.C.B., M.C.,
Representative of British Chiefs of Staff on the
Standing Group of the North Atlantic Treaty
Organization 1954-6.

Amongst a wide circle of prominent authorities we interviewed eminent politicians, leading diplomats and highly placed military experts. The opinions which form the subject matter of this book are ours alone and although minor differences of emphasis emerged during our deliberations, nevertheless the report represents in broad terms our agreed views.

Mr Michael Howard, our rapporteur, who has written what follows, has produced a concise and easily digestible survey which will enable a variety of readers to understand the 'military and political aspects of a military withdrawal in Central and Eastern Europe and the setting up of a neutral and demilitarized zone.'

Our thanks are due to the Royal Institute of International Affairs which, while accepting no responsibility for the outcome of our work, allowed us to meet at Chatham House during our studies.

August 1958

F. J. BELLENGER

Maps

I

Introduction

WHEN on 25 April 1945 Russian and American soldiers met at Torgau, over the shattered ruins of Hitler's Third Reich, they were not only disposing of one of the greatest problems which had ever tormented the peace of the world, but in the same moment giving birth to another, and one far more complex. It was little realized at the time. In 1945 the destruction and partition of Germany worried only the most moderate and far-sighted of thinkers, while the over-running of Eastern Europe by Russian forces was still judged by the standards of war-time strategy rather than those of international politics.¹ There seemed no reason to expect major difficulties to arise out of either of these developments: the fate both of Germany and of Eastern Europe, it was generally believed, would be settled at a peace conference and a normal pattern of life would be restored.

1. When on 30 April 1945 Mr Winston Churchill urged the importance of an American occupation of Prague for the future of Eastern Europe, General Marshall commented: 'Personally, and aside from all logistic, tactical or strategic implications, I should be loath to hazard American lives for purely political purposes.' John Ehrman; *U.K. History of the Second World War, Military Series. Grand Strategy, Vol. VI*, p. 161.

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The four years which followed showed the futility of such hopes. It might have been foreseen that once Russia was drawn into the centre of Europe by military operations she would not easily slacken her hold on a Slavic area into which only the existence of the Hapsburg Empire and Hohenzollern Prussia had prevented her from expanding some two centuries before. It would have been difficult to prise loose the Russian grip on Eastern Europe whatever regime had been in power in Moscow. When to this historical *Drang nach Westen* was added the evangelizing fervour and ruthlessness of international communism the task became a hundred times more difficult. Ideological conviction combined with national self-interest to make the Russians erect communist regimes wherever the fortunes of war had led their troops, and to attempt to do so even where they had not. The war-weary, disarmed, and disunited Western powers felt themselves in danger of being sucked one by one into the maw of this inexorable advance, and drew together for common defence in a series of agreements which culminated in 1949 in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Thus the irenic hopes, which seemed so bright in 1945, of a community of peace-loving nations into which a chastened and unarmed Germany might one day graduate gave way to the reality of two hostile power-blocks which divided Germany between them and refused to abandon any part of the territory they held to their adversary in the cold war.

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One day the ideological struggle which now divides the world may be politically no more significant than those between Protestant and Catholic, or between Christianity and Islam, are today. But until that day there seem to be only four conceivable solutions to the problem of Germany. First we could accept the existing situation and make the best of it. Second, the West could wash its hands of the Federal German Republic, leaving it, like Eastern Germany, to the Russians. Third, the Russians could abandon Eastern Germany, and possibly Eastern Europe as well, to the West and retire to their frontiers of 1939. Finally, both sides could realize the unsatisfactory nature of the present situation, 'disengage' their forces from the disputed area and leave it as an intermediate buffer between East and West.

Let us look first at the policy of acceptance. The exponent of *Realpolitik*, who considers politics in terms not of morality but of power, might argue that the existing situation had much to recommend it. Two major threats to European peace have been obviated. We are not confronted by a united and powerful Germany regaining the dominance of Europe and again threatening world expansion, achieving peacefully the domination which an impatient Hitler sought by war; and the Russian advance has covered, like a glacier, those inflammable areas of racial hatred on the German-Slav frontiers of Europe which provided the immediate

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occasions for two world wars. To those who argue that the present situation is unstable, that the peoples of Eastern Germany and Eastern Europe will not acquiesce indefinitely in their slavery and that sooner or later a dangerous rising is inevitable, the 'realist' will reply that this will depend on the attitude adopted by the West. If we make it quite clear that such risings will never command either our sympathy or our support and that we have washed our hands of the peoples east of the Iron Curtain, such risings are not likely to occur, or be of international concern if they did. We did not allow our policy to be swayed by the Polish risings of 1831 or 1863, or by the Hungarian rising of 1848-9; how much less should we concern ourselves with Eastern Europe today, when there is the attendant risk of unleashing thermo-nuclear war which is likely to destroy rescuer and rescued alike! As for the two Germanies, with the passing of time they may grow into two separate but consanguineous nations as peacefully as did the Low Countries after they were divided, in the sixteenth century, by very similar ideological wars. If our main object is to relax tension and stave off the risk of world war, the best way might be cold-bloodedly to accept the existing frontiers and spheres of influence in Europe as final.

But this type of realism leaves much out of account. The fate of Eastern Europe has stirred Western sympathies and affected Western policy at least since the Bulgarian massacres of 1876, and the

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genuine idealism of humanitarian, middle-class democracies must be recognized as a vital element in calculations of international politics. The liberal ideology of the Anglo-Saxon races would make it impossible for any British or American government openly to adopt any policy such as that outlined above, as it made strict neutrality impossible for the United States in two World Wars. To this must be added another emotional factor: German nationalism. A prosperous and satisfied Western Germany might forget its *irredenta* after a few generations, but prosperity can bring ambition as well as satiety, and it would require a remarkable succession of statesmen to keep German national sentiment permanently under control. Moreover any acceptance of the existing frontiers is made more difficult by the situation of Berlin, where we have made so great an investment of prestige that any withdrawal would be generally regarded as a humiliating defeat. There a small allied garrison and an enclave of western democracy live totally surrounded by communist territory, and it may seem improbable that such a situation can be indefinitely prolonged. But it is not impossible. The most irrational anomalies can survive so long as people are willing to accept them: one might cite the papal enclaves in pre-revolutionary France, the Dutch barrier fortresses in the Austrian Netherlands, and even the Vatican State. Situations are intolerable only if men believe them to be so.

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The second possible outcome for Europe is the absorption of Germany by the East, and to prevent this the West is pledged to fight, quite literally, to the death. Even were the NATO powers to abandon the struggle, German pride, German military competence, and German hatred of Russian communism would suffice to prevent any such absorption occurring peacefully. Whether a unified and independent Germany would deliberately throw in its lot with the East is a different matter. Alarmed historians may recall Tauroggen and Rapallo, or the eastward-looking policies of Bismarck and von Seeckt. But much has happened to change the situation. In previous German-Russian alliances Germany was the senior partner. Bismarck had less to fear from the ramshackle Empire of the Czars, and von Seeckt from the shambles of post-revolutionary Russia, than has Germany from the present Russian colossus: while the unimaginable bitterness left between the two nations by the war of 1941-5 will die very hard.

The only possibility which the West, including the authorities at Bonn, have shown themselves prepared to consider is the third – the absorption of Eastern Germany into Western Europe. This has been the unbending demand of Western statesmen at every conference for the past ten years, and, within Germany, of Dr Adenauer. The West has consistently demanded that German reunification should come only as the result of free elections, in

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the certain knowledge that these would result in the annihilation of the East German regime; and it has demanded, with equal consistency, that the reunified German state should be free to determine the orientation of its own foreign policy, which would mean, with equal certainty, that a reunified Germany would join NATO. There seems little prospect of such a solution ever being acceptable to the existing Russian government.¹ The abandonment of East German communism would be a blow to the prestige of the entire communist cause; while a Russian need not be a communist to see, in a reunited Germany closely allied to the United States and Britain, a permanent threat which no guarantees could allay. *A fortiori* the complete withdrawal of Russian forces to their own frontiers, leaving the

1. One indication to the contrary however must be noted. On 6 February 1955 at the session of the Interparliamentary Union of Eastern Europe in Warsaw, which was attended by a delegation from the USSR, a resolution was passed demanding (a) immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from East Germany and Poland, (b) free and supervised all-German elections as suggested by Sir Anthony Eden a year earlier, and (c) implementation of the resolutions of the Potsdam Conference in 1945. (*Trybuna Ludu*, 6 February 1955.) The leader of the Russian Delegation, A. Puzanov, had just attended a session of the Praesidium of the Party at Moscow, at which it may be presumed that the text of the resolutions to be passed in Warsaw had been discussed and approved. The Eden proposals of 29 January 1955 had included a proviso that future all-German Governments should 'be free to assume any international rights and obligations of the Federal Republic or of the East German regime'.

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states of Eastern Europe totally free to shape their own destinies and adhere if they so wished to the West, would demand a degree of courage and confidence in Russian statesmen which no assessment of probabilities gives us any reason to expect.

We are left with the fourth course: the creation of some intermediate area between East and West in which a reunified Germany would be included. Such a solution has been spurned for the past ten years by Western statesmen both East and West of the Rhine; in the heated atmosphere of ideological warfare 'neutral' has been a word almost of abuse. But ten years of inconclusive wrangling have led some of the leading thinkers and strategists of the West to re-examine this possibility of 'disengagement' and see whether it offers a way out of our dilemma which the other courses do not. We propose in the following pages to consider the principal proposals which have been advanced, and to try to evaluate them, both in political and in military terms.

The evaluation which follows is based on three presuppositions.

First, the West will under no foreseeable circumstances attack Russia; but Russian statesmen will continue to believe that they cannot rely on our not doing so.

Secondly, Western Europe is in no imminent danger of military attack herself. There are, broadly speaking, three views which can be taken of Russian

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intentions. The first is that the shapers of Russian policy believe that the conflict of ideologies can only be resolved, and the triumph of communism over capitalism achieved, by the use of armed force, and that to this all consideration of domestic and foreign policy must be subordinated. If this were true, then clearly any relaxation of our defensive posture, even to change a faulty organization for one which might ultimately prove better, would be an invitation to attack, and the policy of disengagement would not be worth a moment's attention. The second view is that the Russians have abandoned all dreams of world-revolution, are entirely preoccupied with raising their own standard of living, and are prepared for an indefinite period of peaceful co-existence with the rest of the world. If this were so it would then be safe to accept their reiterated proposals, dismantle our alliances, reduce our armed forces to the level of a local constabulary and rely on a world security pact for the maintenance of peace. Disengagement would then present no problems save those of procedure and administration. We accept neither of these views, for reasons which it would be tedious to argue here. Our judgements are based on a third assumption: that the Russian leaders have abandoned none of their belief in the historic mission of communism to conquer the world and in their personal responsibility to ensure that it does. But it is a conquest of which in the long run they feel certain and for

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which they are prepared to wait. They will be patient in their policy and flexible in their means. They will make and keep agreements when it suits them but have no scruples about using force as an instrument of policy when they think that they can safely do so. Such an attitude must be countered by one equally firm, flexible and patient. A relaxation of military precautions would be permissible if it led to compensating economic or political advantages; but it remains essential to retain some degree of 'deterrence' to discourage the Russian leaders from taking unwise risks. It is in this context that the question of 'disengagement' must be examined.

Our last preconception is about the purpose which disengagement is intended to serve. Over this point one can trace some division among its advocates. On the one hand there is the belief stated, for example, by Mr Gaitskell, that disengagement would lead to a slackening in world tension, suit the interests of the East as well as of the West and thus reduce the danger of global war. On the other hand it has been seen as a step in the cold war, and the argument advanced that if we can 'force' Russia to leave Eastern Germany and Eastern Europe we shall have gained a substantial victory. This school of thought aims not at relaxing tension but at increasing it. As Senator Humphrey put it on 5 February 1958: 'A withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Germany and Poland could result in a political upheaval of significant proportions and

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meaning for a free Europe'.¹ These two points of view are not easily compatible, and for the purpose of this study we adopt the first. The object to be pursued is to relieve the suspicions and the burden of arms on both sides, and not to gain an advantage in the cold war. Both the reunification of Germany and the withdrawal of Russian forces from Eastern Europe must be judged as means to this end. If these measures seem instead likely to intensify fears and create new tensions, then however desirable they may be in themselves it may be necessary to relinquish them in the general interests of the peaceful survival of mankind.

Finally it must be explained that this study is restricted to measures for the total disengagement of Russian and NATO forces from a 'central zone' in the middle of Europe. Proposals for arms limitation, inspection, or thinning out of troops which leave the political situation unchanged are not here considered. We thus devote no attention to, for example, the Rapacki Plan for a non-nuclear zone in Central Europe. It is obvious that any disengagement policy would have to be accompanied, and probably preceded, by wider disarmament measures. But these demand a study in themselves. Until it has been made, the remarks which follow are necessarily incomplete.

1. *New York Herald Tribune*, 5 February 1958.

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THE idea that the deadlock in Europe could be resolved only by 'disengagement', the withdrawal of Western and Russian troops from mutual contact and the creation between them of a military neutral and politically independent area, is not of recent origin. It was aired by Dr Pfeiderer, the late German Ambassador in Belgrade, as early as 1952. Since 1953 M Paul van Zeeland, sometime Belgian Foreign Minister, has been advocating a settlement which would involve the demilitarization of Eastern Germany with an area on either side which should contain only German or Polish troops. As his plans leave a reunified Germany within the framework of NATO they have little prospect of being acceptable to the Russians, and have never been officially adopted by anyone. It was in the summer of 1954, when the 'von Bonin controversy' broke out in Western Germany, that disengagement became a live political issue. It will be remembered that Colonel Bogislav von Bonin, a wartime Chief of Operations on the German General Staff and one of the specialists in the Blank Office responsible for planning the organization and strategy of the new Federal Army, found himself in violent disagreement with the official policy for the defence of

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Western Germany. He objected to the plan for Germany to raise a conscript army of 500,000 men and subordinate it entirely to a NATO strategy which visualized the abandonment of great tracts of German soil. Instead he suggested an elite army, some 150,000 strong, organized in defensive units along a frontier zone about 50 km deep; strongly armed with anti-tank weapons and supported by a local militia and mobile armoured forces. NATO forces could be held back behind the Rhine and constitute a strategic reserve. Such an organization, he argued, would not merely protect German territory. By making it possible for NATO forces to be stationed behind the Rhine it would one day facilitate the evacuation of Germany by foreign units and the consequent reunification of the country.¹ As von Bonin's disciple, Major Adalbert Weinstein was to put it, 'for the Federal Republic, divisions only make sense if they increase defensive morale in West Germany without becoming an obstacle to the political forces of a reunified Germany'.² But Bonin's interest in disengagement smacked of 'neutralism'; his mistrust of a large conscript army and desire for an elite force looked to the Bonn democrats like Prussian militarism; and his belief in the possibility of linear defence seemed anachron-

1. See Hans Speir, *German Rearmament and Atomic War*. Illinois, 1957.

2. Adalbert Weinstein, *Keiner kann den Krieg gewinnen*. Bonn, 1955, p. 65.

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istic to his superiors in the Blank Office. He was forced to resign, and he then drifted into more questionable 'neutralist' activities which did much to discredit his original ideas. To the best of our knowledge they have never since been revived or seriously considered.

Interest in disengagement revived in July 1955 when Sir Anthony Eden in his opening statement at the Heads of Government Conference at Geneva said, a little ambiguously 'We should be ready to examine the possibility of a demilitarized area between East and West'¹; a proposal which found its way into the directive which the Heads of Government gave to their Foreign Ministers which instructed them to investigate, *inter alia*, the 'establishment between East and West of a zone in which the disposition of armed forces will be subject to mutual agreement'². Later developments made it clear that Sir Anthony visualized simply a measure of local disarmament and not the total disengagement of Western and Eastern forces. Two years later, in May 1957, when the Russians suggested returning to the Eden Plan under the impression that it did contain provision for a neutralized central zone, a belief which President Eisenhower apparently shared, the Government of the German

1. *Geneva Conference of Heads of Governments 18-23 July 1955*. Cmd 9543, HMSO 1955 p. 18.

2. *Washington Official Report of the Geneva Conference 1955*, p. 67.

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Federal Republic became thoroughly alarmed, and Western statesmen had categorically to assure Dr Adenauer that there was no question of forcing on him a neutrality which he did not desire. On 13 May 1957 Mr Selwyn Lloyd declared in the House of Commons 'there is no Eden Plan for a neutral zone in Europe'¹; and the following day Mr John Foster Dulles proclaimed that the U.S. did not favour any plan at present for creating a neutral zone in Germany or anywhere else.²

By this time however, plans for disengagement were being widely discussed. The rising in Hungary in the autumn of 1956 had made the question an immediate one and to the wish to reunify Germany was added the urgent desire to liberate a turbulent Eastern Europe. Certain leading members of the British Labour Party had long shown themselves interested in the project, and their thinking was crystallized by Mr Hugh Gaitskell in the lectures which he delivered at Harvard in the Spring of 1957, and later published under the title *The Challenge of Co-Existence*. The Hungarian rising, he there argued, had revealed the explosive nature of the situation in Eastern Europe. If a similar rising occurred in Eastern Germany the Western Germans, now armed as they had not been in 1953, might go to the rescue; and what then would be the attitude of their allies? The best hope of world peace lay in the

1. *The Times*, 14 May 1957.

2. *New York Times*, 15 May 1957.

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evacuation of the danger area and the creation, by stages, of a disengaged zone 'until it covered, say, the whole of Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, and if possible, Rumania and Bulgaria'. Within this zone the armed forces would be subject to inspection and control; and 'finally, together with the permanent control on arms in these territories there should be a multilateral European security plan, in which the various states in the neutral zone would have their territories guaranteed by the Great Powers as well as by each other'.¹ Three conditions were necessary for the success of such a withdrawal. First Germany must accept her existing frontiers. Secondly NATO must continue in being, and American forces remain in Western Europe, as an earnest of Western unity and determination. And lastly any such plan must be put forward only after full agreement on it had been reached by all the nations of the West.

This scheme, or something like it, has virtually become official British Labour doctrine. Mr Bevan, who had been interested in disengagement over a number of years, argued in favour of it repeatedly. Mr Alfred Robens associated himself with it when he visited Berlin in April 1957; and it has been powerfully restated by Mr Denis Healey in his pamphlet *A Neutral Belt in Europe*, which the Fabian Society published in January 1958. In this study Mr Healey added, from his specialist studies in

1. *The Challenge of Co-Existence*, 1957, pp. 54-8.

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military policy, two points to Mr Gaitskell's thesis. First, Russian willingness to consider disengagement might be increased by 'the fear that, unless the Soviet Union can organize a completely new sort of European settlement with western agreement, each of the western countries on the Soviet frontier will be equipped with atomic weapons'. And secondly, the development of small atomic weapons would make it possible to keep Russia from re-entering the disengaged zone by offering the 'disincentive' of a limited nuclear war.

These proposals were very much in line with those of the German Social Democratic party, which also, in the electoral campaign of 1957, called for a reunited Germany and the replacement of existing military alliances by a collective security system, in which would be included provisions for the limitation and control of armaments.¹ But the Social Democrats were extremely sensitive to any suggestion that they were in favour of German neutrality, and they angrily repudiated Dr Adenauer's accusations to this effect as 'simply untrue'.² Herr Ollenhauer maintained that neutrality for a reunited Germany would be impossible; that she

1. e.g. Herr Ollenhauer's statement on 21 June 1957 (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 23 June 1957). For a Social-Democratic argument that German membership of NATO constituted an impassable barrier to reunification, see Herr Erler's article 'The Struggle for German Reunification' in *Foreign Affairs*, April 1956.

2. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 July 1957.

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must be a full member of a European security pact.¹ The Christian Democrats on the other hand had shown themselves unflinching in their opposition to any notion of disengagement. In April 1957, Dr von Brentano specifically attacked the Gaitskell Plan. 'Isolation between the two great world power blocks,' he argued, was 'not compatible with freedom,'² and throughout the electoral campaign, Dr Adenauer supported this view with all his immense authority. One dissident voice was raised among the Christian Democrats: on 19 February 1957 the Minister of Defence, Herr Strauss, declared that once Germany was reunited she would have an absolute right to decide her own policy, and painful necessity might make her decide for neutrality. 'The West,' he added, 'would not want to and could not prevent Germany from making such a decision.'³ But Herr Strauss's views seemed to have found no echo among his colleagues.

In the autumn election of 1957 the Social Democrats suffered a crushing electoral defeat, and the prospects of disengagement seemed more remote than ever. But public interest revived when Mr George Kennan, the former State Department specialist on Russian Affairs and sometime U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, reverted to the question in his Reith Lectures in London in November and

1. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 July 1957.

2. *Der Tagesspiegel*, 26 April 1957.

3. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 February 1957.

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December of the same year. He again stressed the unsatisfactory nature of the status quo.

The state of the satellite area today, and particularly of Poland, is neither fish nor fowl, neither complete Stalinist domination nor real independence. Things cannot be expected to remain this way for long. There must either be further violent efforts by people in that area to take things into their own hands, and to achieve independence by their own means, or there must be the beginning of some process of real adjustment to the fact of Soviet domination. I can conceive of no escape from this dilemma that would not involve the early departure of Soviet troops from the satellite countries.

The present situation moreover

expects too much, and for too long a time, of the United States, which is not a European power . . . It leaves unsolved the extremely precarious and unsound arrangements which now govern the status of Berlin.¹

The precise nature of the withdrawal Professor Kennan had in mind was made clear in a further broadcast on 20 December, when he declared himself prepared to see all American forces withdrawn from the continent and eventually Britain, so long as her NATO obligations still remained. The 'atomic deterrent' he maintained, would become operable at once if there were any attempt by the Russians to reinvade Europe.² Professor Kennan's proposals thus went considerably further than

1. *The Listener*, 28 November 1957.

2. *New York Times*, 29 December 1957.

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those of Mr Gaitskell, and they were widely discussed in a Europe which was beginning to realize some of the less pleasant implications of the NATO decision to defend her soil with atomic weapons and to offer sites for American missile bases. But official reaction, especially in Germany, was stony. In Bonn the official organ *Diplomatische Korrespondent* described the Kennan proposals as unreal, and 'a complicated form of suicide for the peoples of Europe who still live in freedom'; and Mr Dean Acheson not only explicitly disclaimed all responsibility for them on behalf of the Democratic Party but published an outspoken attack on them in the next issue of *Foreign Affairs*.¹

The Kennan proposals did however find one powerful, if unofficial, supporter in Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Slessor, who argued his case in three articles in the *New York Herald Tribune*.² The defence of Europe, he there maintained, was anyhow impossible.

Would the danger from 500 Russian submarines be any more menacing if there were not still a few British and American divisions in Germany? Does anyone really imagine that 28 NATO divisions with atomic weapons could stop an invasion by 150 Russian divisions armed with the same weapon? Can anyone believe that in that almost inconceivable event the nuclear holocaust could be avoided, whether Allied divisions are on German soil or not?

1. *Foreign Affairs*, April 1958.

2. 30-31 January, 1 February 1958.

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All that NATO forces could provide was a screen to reduce the chances of our stumbling into war accidentally: to prevent our position being gradually nibbled away by the usual Communist methods . . . to make it too dangerous for any of Germany's Eastern neighbours to present us with some outrageous *fait accompli* . . . in short to act as a fire brigade to smother the small outbreak before it can spread into a general conflagration. Such a role could be filled by a mobile well-trained German Army, armed with conventional weapons.

Finally, U.S. military withdrawal from Europe need involve no return to isolationism.

It makes no sense in an age of space satellites to think of this or that country as a European Power or a Western hemisphere power – more than ever today we are all in the same boat.

If need be, token U.S. and British forces could be left west of the German frontier, and token Russian forces east of it, to assuage the fears of East and West.

Meanwhile, while independent thinkers in the West have been feeling their way towards a policy of disengagement, official Russian spokesmen have been urging it formally and informally ever since Stalin died. The Soviet Government waged an intensive campaign throughout 1952–1955 to keep Western Germany from joining NATO by offering German reunification on the basis of free elections so long as the reunited nation held aloof from such military alliances. This was the policy urged in the draft for a peace treaty put forward by the Soviet

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Government in March 1952; by Mr. Molotov at the Foreign Ministers' Conference in January 1954; and again in the Soviet Government statement of January 1955, that:

The German people should be given the opportunity, by holding free general elections throughout Germany, including Berlin, to express their will freely. . . . No section of Germany must be bound by any conditions of separate agreements regarding the participation in military groupings.¹

At the Geneva Conference in July 1955, Marshal Bulganin declared 'The Soviet Government is of the opinion that our eventual objective should be to have no foreign troops remaining on the territories of European States.'² A year later, in June 1956, he reiterated his suggestion, proposing to start with a progressive reduction of troops on German soil leading to their total withdrawal;³ and in November there came a specific proposal 'to liquidate within two years the foreign military, naval and air bases in the territory of other states'. Mr Khrushchev took up the question on 20 February 1957 in the interviews which he gave to Mr Joseph Alsop and Mr Chester Bowles. Both American and Rus-

1. *Soviet News*, 15 March 1952, 4 February 1954, 17 January 1955.

2. *Geneva Conference of Heads of Governments, 18-23 July 1955*. Cmnd 9543, HMSO 1955; p. 22.

3. Letter to President Eisenhower, 6 June 1956. Text in *New York Times*, 9 June 1956.

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sian troops should be withdrawn from Europe, he suggested, and the countries of Western Europe should withdraw their forces from each others' soil. Peace could then be assured by agreements between the Warsaw Pact and the NATO nations.¹ The following July, on his television appearance over the Columbia Broadcasting System network, he returned to the charge. 'Why couldn't the United States and the other countries withdraw their troops from Western Germany? From the other countries of the West? From France, Italy – where else have you got troops? Turkey, Greece perhaps, while we withdraw our troops from Eastern Germany, from Poland, from Hungary, from Rumania?'² And in the note which he sent Dr Adenauer on 10 December 1957, Marshal Bulganin reminded the Chancellor of Soviet readiness 'to reduce the strength of its troops in Germany, or withdraw them from Germany as well as from other countries where they are stationed in conformity with the Warsaw Treaty, provided that the armed forces of the United States, Great Britain and France are withdrawn from the territories of the Federal Republic of Germany and from other NATO member countries'.³

Sir John Slessor, in the articles quoted above, has argued that we should test the Russians.

1. *New York Herald Tribune*, 21 February 1957.
2. *New York Times*, 3 June 1957.
3. *Soviet News Booklet* No. 21, p. 27.

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If we make an honest attempt to meet them on terms which include so much of what they have proclaimed to the world as their own desiderata and they reject it – well the onus is on them, and we shall be no worse off militarily and much better off politically.

What, however, if they do accept it? What would be the effect of disengagement on the military and political situation in the West?

3

The Role of NATO

THE North Atlantic Treaty Organization came into being in April 1949, and consists of the United States and Canada, the United Kingdom, France, the Benelux powers, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Italy and Portugal, Greece and Turkey (which joined in 1952), and since 1955 the Federal German Republic. The Member States have agreed 'that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all', and that they 'separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack'.¹ At the same time they expressed their determination to strengthen their free institutions and promote conditions 'of stability and well-being'.

It quickly became clear that these last two resolutions would not be easy to reconcile. In September 1951 the Military Committee of NATO reported 'that the aggregate of the defence contribution offered by member governments fell short of the level of forces and equipment which the military authorities regarded as essential for the defence of

1. Lord Ismay, *NATO. The First Five Years 1949-1954*, p. 13.

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the North Atlantic Area'.¹ This area was divided for purposes of land defence into a Northern Area (Scandinavian) a Central Area (Germany) and a Southern Area (Italy, Greece, and Turkey)²; and in April 1951 only some fifteen divisions were available to defend it. 'The basic idea,' at this time, 'was that the active forces should form a shield capable of withstanding the initial shock of any aggression,' and that the reserve forces should be mobilised and moved up to support the shield as quickly as possible.³ The danger visualized was still that of a massive Russian land attack, as yet unsupported by any degree of nuclear air power; and to repel this danger the North Atlantic Council, meeting in Lisbon in February 1952, agreed to build up by the end of the year a force of 50 first line divisions and 4,000 aircraft, with a further 50 divisions in reserve.

But although NATO made considerable progress in simplifying the administration and building up the 'infra-structure' – the supply channels, communications, command and liaison arrangements – of the huge and complex alliance, it never came within sight of this ambitious target, and during the

1. Lord Ismay, *NATO, The First Five Years 1949–1954*, p. 43.

2. Since we are here concerned with the possible re-organization of forces in the Central Area, little will be said about the Northern and Southern fronts, or about the naval commands. But their importance as part of the NATO structure must not be underestimated.

3. Ismay, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

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next two years two developments occurred which made necessary a reappraisal of NATO strategy. The first was Russia's achievement of atomic parity, which made it difficult, tactically, to visualize a campaign in which there would be the chance to raise and bring reserve formations into action at all, and equally difficult, strategically, to visualize a campaign in Europe which would not be part of a global thermo-nuclear war. The role of NATO was therefore re-defined by the Supreme Commander, General Gruenther, in January 1954:

We have an air-ground shield which, although still not strong enough, would force an enemy to concentrate prior to attack. In doing so the concentrating force will be extremely vulnerable to losses from atomic weapon attacks. . . . We think that it is of such strength that the Soviets do not now have in occupied Europe sufficient air and ground forces to be certain of overwhelming this shield. Of course the Soviets can move in additional forces to overcome that deficiency. But if they do, we should be able to get some warning of an impending attack.¹

The second development was the appearance of atomic weapons with a sufficiently limited explosive power for them to be used in a battlefield role against 'tactical' targets. In 1954 it was decided that on the Central Front thirty divisions armed with such weapons would be enough to fulfil the task outlined by General Gruenther in the event of a Russian attack; and in 1957 that target was again reduced, to twenty-eight.

1. Ismay, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

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That figure has not yet been reached. NATO strength on the Central Front is at present between nineteen and twenty divisions, and the training and state of readiness of many of these leaves a great deal to be desired. The United States furnishes five divisions and three armoured cavalry regiments which make up the strength of a sixth. Canada has in Europe one brigade. The United Kingdom has some three divisions, but the present trend of our defence policy makes it doubtful whether they can be indefinitely kept up to strength. Of the five divisions already available from France about four are tied up in Algeria. There remain three divisions found by the Benelux powers and seven by the Federal German Republic – the latter still in the early stages of their training. It would be rash to assume that these forces really add up, in terms of fighting ability, to twenty effective divisions. It would also be unwise to assume that the prospect of General Norstad achieving his ultimate target are good. To reach it the French will need to release their four divisions from North Africa. The Germans will have to raise five more divisions, to fulfil the requirements set by NATO in 1954; and the British Government must resist the strong temptation, which will arise if the question of support costs cannot be finally resolved and recruiting figures do not come up to the expectation of the Minister of Defence, to reduce their commitments yet further. It can be assumed for the purposes of our argument

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that twenty-four is a more reasonable total for SHAPE, in the immediate future, to aim at.

What could these forces achieve in their existing state of numbers and training? And what could a complete force of twenty-four divisions be expected to achieve?

First let us look at the enemy which confronts them. The total armed strength of the U.S.S.R. is about 170 line divisions,¹ with a further seventy divisions from the satellite powers. The political unreliability of these last, makes it possible to discount them in the military equation; the Russian force with which NATO would have initially to deal is a group of twenty divisions held in Eastern Germany with a further ten at present employed on security duties in Eastern Europe. This force is – or soon will be – entirely armoured; its dependence on rearward communications has been cut to the minimum; and its composition and training has been based on the assumption that allied bombing of Russian communications and the homeland will effectively prevent any further elements of Russian strength from being brought into play. Russian planning in fact seems to take at its face value the constantly reiterated allied threat that any invasion of Western Europe will inevitably bring about thermo-nuclear war,

1. An important section of Soviet artillery is organized in field-artillery and AA divisions – about 35 altogether. If these are counted in, the total would thus be 205.

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and to be directed to the end at once of getting Russian forces away from their bomb-ravaged homeland and of seizing Western Europe, both as a sanctuary and as a hostage.

Against this force there is little hope that the existing NATO divisions could 'defend' Europe in a traditional sense, even with the aid of atomic weapons in a tactical role. Russian spearheads might reach the Rhine in a few days and much of Germany might have to be abandoned within as many weeks. The function of these forces can be defined as being, first, to act as a trigger-mechanism to bring the full force of American retaliation into play against the U.S.S.R.; secondly, to force the advancing Russian formations to concentrate and so provide a target for our atomic attack; and thirdly to defend the vital radar installations in Western Germany which would not only give warning of Russian air attack but provide navigational aids to our own attacking aircraft.

The continuing importance of this latter task, however, is doubtful. In global war – and in the existing state of NATO forces an attack can only mean global war – these installations would have done their work once they had given warning of the first attack, and it is doubtful whether they would have the chance to do more. They would be knocked out from the air by atomic bombs or missiles within a very few hours. As manned bombers give way to missiles the importance of navigational

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aids will dwindle, and the warning which such installations can give of the launching of enemy missiles will be in the order of a few minutes. Moreover if the Russians did launch a surprise attack, Europe would be only one quarter, and that not the most important, from which retaliation against the U.S.S.R. would come. The decisive interchange of bombs or missiles is more likely to take place across the North Pole. Thus the effectiveness of Western retaliation will depend only partially on the continued functioning of European early-warning stations. Finally it must be noticed that even manned bombers are developing techniques of low flying which will enable them virtually to evade radar-detection. The importance of the defence of the early-warning system by ground forces is thus perhaps rather less than has sometimes been supposed.

Will NATO be able to do any more than this even when its forces are fully up to strength? Will it, in particular, be able to deny the territory of Western Europe to a Russian force bent on over-running all or part of it, by using conventional or low-yield atomic weapons and without invoking global thermo-nuclear war? On this opinions sharply differ. British governmental statements have flatly declared it to be impossible. But such distinguished independent commentators as Capt. B. H. Liddell Hart have pointed out that since a successful attack normally demands a three to one superiority over the defence, thirty divisions fight-

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ing in prepared and fortified terrain might hold up nearly 100 attacking divisions with conventional arms alone – given at least equality in training, equipment and morale. But they are not likely to have the opportunity, since ‘tactical atomic weapons’ – bombs, shells, or missile warheads with a low atomic yield and a radius of destruction measured at most in hundreds of yards – are becoming, rightly or wrongly, a conventional part of the NATO armoury. The impression is growing that American military planners, in contrast to the British, do believe that a war waged with such weapons could be kept localized. We cannot therefore dismiss out of hand the possibility that up-to-strength NATO forces with tactical atomic weapons might be able to deny Western Europe to the Russians, at least for long enough to present the aggressors with the choice between initiating global war themselves or abandoning the attack. But official opinion at SHAPE still discounts the possibility that a war in Europe could be kept limited, and even the most enthusiastic advocates of ‘limited atomic war’ admit that Europe is the least likely theatre where it could take place. And we should note that there is no indication from Russian sources that the U.S.S.R. visualizes any invasion of Western Europe except in conjunction with a simultaneous attack – or retaliation – against the homelands of their major enemies.

Nevertheless even if a strengthened NATO could

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not in the long run 'defend' Europe any more than can the existing forces, it will improve the situation in two vital respects. It will first be able to deal with local outbursts, whether spontaneous or engineered, very much more effectively than can be done at present. We have so far considered only the highly improbable eventuality of a deliberate and massive Russian attack with the object of overrunning Western Europe; but there is a whole spectrum of lesser possibilities. There may be tentative frontier violations by Eastern Germany or the other satellites. There may be outbursts of various kinds in Berlin. There may be 'mistakes' by subordinate Russian commanders which the Kremlin would if necessary disown. There may be planned Russian attacks with purely local and limited objectives. The larger the force available to deal with such outbreaks, the less likely they are to occur at all. Secondly, if the Russians were to launch a deliberate attack, a larger force would win more time positively to identify the nature of the aggression and make quite certain that it was on a scale which warranted the unleashing of 'massive retaliation' with all its unimaginable consequences. Thus even if a completed NATO force could not fight a 'limited' war, it would reduce the possibility of accidental and unnecessary global war developing from any incident in Central Europe.

To these two advantages must be added a third: the firm defence of the mouth of the Baltic and its

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closing against egress by Russian submarines. In the event of global war any diminution of Russian striking power will be valuable, and missile-equipped submarines constitute one of the most formidable weapons in their armoury. The control of the gates of the Baltic, as of the Black Sea, thus remains a *desideratum* in Western defence policy. But we must not overrate it. We are no longer dealing with the Russia of Peter the Great or Nicholas I, a westward-looking power backed by a barely traversable wilderness of mountain and steppe. Russian submarines can strike north from Murmansk and east from Vladivostok as well as west, and the blocking of their western exits – in any case an extraordinarily difficult operation – would not keep them from taking to the sea in considerable force; or from being already at sea when the war began.

We would therefore sum up the military role of NATO as follows. It provides a force strong enough to quench any 'brush-fire' outbreaks in Central Europe and deal with any minor eruptions from the East. It ensures that any Russian attack on Europe must be mounted on a scale massive enough to be unmistakably identified and in concentrations large enough to provide targets for air attack. It can hold up any invasion long enough for allied air power to come into play, whether against 'tactical' or against 'strategic' targets; and it would defend on the ground those areas, the immediate loss of which might be decisive in the conduct of global war.

4

Political Problems of Disengagement

WE must now see how far these objects could still be achieved if the existing military structure were modified by any plan for disengagement in Europe. But before we do this, we must look at the political aspects of the question.

There is good reason, as we have seen, for believing that the reunification of Germany and the restoration of full sovereignty to the states of Eastern Europe would create political problems at least as menacing to the peace of the world as those they would solve. All the evidence goes to show that the German people are as chastened and as pacific as were the French after the fall of Bonaparte. Yet at the Princeton Conference on NATO in 1957 whose participants came from all Western European nations, 'it was possible to sense on the part of many discussants', according to the rapporteur, 'a deep-seated fear that a reunited Germany as the leader of a Central European security arrangement might soon lead to a resurgent and aggressively nationalistic Germany'.¹ Such fears may be as irrational as a physical reflex, but the conditioning

1. Gordon Patterson and Edgar S. Furniss Jr., *NATO: A Critical Appraisal*. Princeton University Conference, 1957, p. 93.

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process which inculcated that reflex was long and thorough. The nations of Western Europe which have accepted, not without qualms, the Federal German Republic as an equal and necessary ally in an international organization might look with different eyes on a Germany enlarged, separate, and perhaps strengthened by a train of East-European satellites. Could international control prevent rearmament today any more effectively than it did after the First World War? And if it could, would not Germany be all the more formidable as an economic competitor? Such emotions may be parochial, anachronistic and unworthy, but they exist and as a factor in the problem they cannot be ignored.

Fears for the stability of Eastern Europe also have good historical foundation. The regimes which would emerge once the Russian forces withdrew would need to be considerably more stable than those whose internal convulsions and mutual antipathies convulsed Europe for half a century before those forces arrived. In particular a peaceful and permanent settlement must be found to the problem of Germany's frontiers with Poland. At present the prospects for this are not encouraging. Many German political leaders are prepared to admit in private that they would be prepared to pay 'a very high price' for reunification; but such acquiescence has not yet found its way into the public pronouncements of either Christian Democrat or

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Social Democrat leaders,¹ and a political furore is inevitable when it does. The furore may die down, but it is difficult to see any settlement being reached which will not leave an angry and vociferous group of irredentists in one country or the other – quite possibly both.

Peaceful solutions must also be found to other racial and frontier problems in Eastern Europe. Teschen and Macedonia are unlikely to give further trouble, but Hungary and Rumania must settle their difference over Transylvania, and the racial tensions between Czechs and Slovaks and Hungarians must somehow be resolved. Moreover these old racial problems are likely to be complicated by new political ones. In East Germany, in Poland, in Hungary and in Rumania the existing communist regimes would probably be swept away: but will this happen without internal chaos, and will the communists then peacefully accept final defeat? In

1. In January 1957, for example, Dr von Brentano bitterly assailed the suggestion that Germany might achieve unity by offering territorial sacrifices in the East. The Oder-Neisse frontier, he declared, was 'not acceptable now or in the future' (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1 February 1957). Two months later, at the Königswinter Conference, 'the only point on which British Conservative and Labour members appeared to agree was on the need for the formal acceptance by Germany of the Oder-Neisse frontier if . . . any . . . plan for German reunification were to have a chance of success, and their opposition to this view appeared to be the only point on which all the German participants agreed' (*Manchester Guardian*, 8 May 1957).

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Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, where the Communist parties are tougher, better organized, and can claim a certain element of consent the regimes might remain; but would this be placidly accepted by liberal elements within and beyond their frontiers? Would disengagement, in short, produce, not a congeries of placid Finlands and Austrias, but an area as turbulent and dangerous as the Middle East, and one whose troubles the communists could be confidently expected to exploit without scruple? Such fears may also be anachronistic, but in ignoring these questions altogether the advocates of disengagement lay themselves open to a reasonable charge of utopianism.

In fact there may well be grounds for cautious optimism about possible developments in Eastern Europe – for believing that the peoples and politicians have learned the lessons of the past twenty years as well as have the peoples and leaders of Germany. There is a strong movement towards federalism, which might resolve these complex questions of race and frontier as effectively as similar problems have been resolved within Tito's Yugoslavia.

Where communism does remain it may take on, as it has already in Poland, a more flexible and acceptable form. Where it disappears a peaceful dialectic may emerge, as it has in Austria, between a Catholic peasant party and a largely urban Social-Democrat party, each prepared if need be to play

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the part of loyal opposition. As an exponent of this optimistic view we may quote M. Tilca, former Rumanian minister in London, who on 28 May 1957 wrote in *The Times*:

There is a new world growing in Central Europe; it is anti-Communist and anti-Capitalist in that it does not want to be dominated by either extreme. It is not Socialist in the strict sense of the word, but it is looking for a new socialistic solution in which the land would belong to those who worked it and the factories to those who toiled in them. State capitalism is repudiated; so is one-party dictatorship. Freedom should be based on free election, but no old parties will be able to stand if they have no roots in the masses and if they stick to old-fashioned programmes.

The volcanoes of East-European politics, like those of German nationalism, may have burned themselves out. But it must be realized that any programme of disengagement will incur considerable *political* risks, whatever the military consequences may be; and our alarm at the dangers of the present position must not blind us to them.

5

A Disarmed Central Zone

THE various proposals for disengagement can be divided into three groups. The first deals with the withdrawal of forces only from a reunified Germany, leaving that country either virtually demilitarized, as is Austria, or with enough conventional forces to put up a substantial initial resistance to invasion. The second contemplates the withdrawal of forces not only from Germany but also from Eastern Europe – primarily those states, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, from which a direct attack could be launched on the West; and these also contemplate either a demilitarized or a conventionally armed zone. Finally there are the proposals that all foreign bases and troops on European soil should be removed, the Russians withdrawing to their frontiers and the British and Americans to theirs.

Let us consider those projects of disengagement which propose leaving a demilitarized area between the two power blocs, and take first the case of Germany. All foreign troops and bases would be withdrawn from German soil, except such technicians as were needed to operate early-warning systems, the Russians on the Western frontiers of Germany and NATO on the East. The German

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government would undertake not to attempt any revision of its frontiers, nor to adhere to NATO or to the Warsaw Pact, and to accept a ceiling on its forces which would restrict their role to that of preserving internal order. German frontiers would then be guaranteed by a European security pact.

Such a solution might have been the natural outcome of the Second World War had the Allies remained united; and it might still have been possible had Germany remained weak, impoverished and dependent on her victors. As it is, it would be highly unrealistic to expect the majority of German voters to accept, as the price of reunification, a position of permanent impotence, subject to a unique degree of international inspection, with their territories beyond the Oder lost for ever to Poland and a Russian army stationed on their eastern frontier. Were such a solution now to be imposed by international agreement on a nation whose wealth and self-confidence increases every day, a degree of political unrest is to be expected which would make that country a source of far greater political tension than exists anywhere in Europe. The inclination which certain Social Democrat politicians seem sometimes to have shown towards such a solution has not proved a source of electoral strength to them; while the attendant military disadvantages to the West furnish additional arguments against forcing on the German people a policy which they clearly do not favour and which

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could be made to work only by a system of inspection and control which would demand a remarkable degree of Russo-Western unanimity and be increasingly difficult to carry out.

The nature of these military disadvantages can be considered together with those of the second proposal, a demilitarized 'central zone' embracing both Germany and the East European states; for they are identical, with the addition that the Russians would withdraw only 200 miles to the Oder instead of 500 miles to their own frontiers. For the West the second proposal, involving as it does the liberation of the satellite states, possesses obvious advantages over the first. Whether there is any prospect of obtaining Russian consent will be considered later. The question for immediate consideration is whether such a measure, if it *were* accepted, would relax tension between the powers and render war less likely without placing the West at a decisive disadvantage if war did come. We presume, as in the case of Germany, that disengagement would be accompanied by a European security pact guaranteeing all frontiers, and that provision would be made for early-warning installations to remain in the Central Zone.

First of all, it is hard to see how NATO could deal under such circumstances with those techniques of gradual infiltration and 'sub-threshold' aggression which might result in the central zone being absorbed in the Eastern bloc without any

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overt act of aggression to make the Western guarantee operative. No formal act of aggression was committed on Czechoslovakia in 1948, and when in 1956 Russian troops entered Budapest it was allegedly at the invitation of a Hungarian government. On the other hand it is true that neither Austria nor Finland have suffered from their demilitarized status, and this argues on the part of the Soviet government an intelligent recognition of the bounds which it is unwise to pass. In Marxist doctrine the Soviet Army exists to support and defend revolution rather than to precipitate it, and the armed invasion of a country where a revolutionary situation is not yet judged to exist is unlikely – especially after the Finnish War of 1939–40. Overt aggression is not the most probable threat which a demilitarized zone would have to meet. Aggression, if any, is likely to take subtler forms, which even the forces of NATO would be incompetent to repel, but to which healthy, prosperous and self-confident states, in constant intercourse with the West, might prove comparatively immune. Their chances of a successful resistance to such sapping and mining is less a military than a political and economic matter. But there can be no question, if our appreciation of Russian intentions is correct, about their being the target for such sapping and mining, to which the West would be tempted to retaliate in kind; and it would require a remarkable degree of prosperity and stability,

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under such circumstances, for the states in such a central area to be placid buffers and bulwarks of peace rather than foci of tension and intrigue. Should such tension explode into civil or intra-zonal war, it would almost certainly be under such ambiguous conditions that there would be grave and genuine doubt among the NATO powers whether a *casus foederis* had arisen.

The first of the roles which the forces of NATO fulfil at present would be impossible. How far could they fulfil the others, which they would be called upon to play in the event of overt Russian aggression against Western Europe? Such an attack, it must be borne in mind, would now have to start from the Russian frontier and cover an additional 500 miles over bad roads through hostile territory. This disadvantage of distance would severely hamper the best equipped armoured force, even if it were backed up – or rather preceded – by airborne divisions; but it is improbable that the hostility of the former satellite powers, real as it might be, could find effective enough expression in acts of sabotage in time to have any appreciable effect on Russian plans. Moreover, behind the armoured spear-heads designed to overrun western Europe would roll security divisions and police services in ample strength to reimpose Russian rule on the East.

There could be no question, in such conditions, of NATO being able to defend such important

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points as the mouth of the Baltic. If such an assault were launched on Europe in the context of a general attack on the West, with air attacks on the American and British homelands, then the absence of NATO forces east of the Rhine, even if this made possible the rapid seizure by the Russians of Denmark and the Channel ports would be, in the setting of a general thermo-nuclear exchange, a matter of minor importance. After twelve hydrogen bombs have landed on the United Kingdom there will be graver things to worry about than the presence of Russian spearheads at Calais. But if the Russians do not themselves initiate the thermo-nuclear exchange, but attack with conventional forces, professing purely limited objectives – to separate the combatants, perhaps, in a German-Polish frontier skirmish, or to protect Russian citizens in ‘Fascist-inspired’ riots in Munich or Hamburg – the absence of friendly forces on the ground would become a matter of tragic significance. The decision to retaliate with nuclear air power would be an agonizing and probably a slow one to take, and before it was taken the aggressors might well have achieved their object, professed their absence of further ambitions, and challenged the West to commit suicide in getting them out. In such a case NATO would rightly hesitate to call in the help of Strategic Air Command; and the Central Zone could only be prevented from being ‘nibbled to death’ in this fashion by the speed with which SHAPE could move its forces to

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deal with well-planned offensives launched in ambiguous political conditions under a verbal smoke screen which would probably effectively confuse world opinion. If both forces started simultaneously the excellent road network of West Germany might make up for the additional distance which NATO forces would have to travel. But the aggressor would gain the advantage of surprise; NATO aircraft would be handicapped by the loss of their forward bases in Germany; and finally the number of NATO divisions available to advance from the Rhine would be a matter of some doubt.

This last point is one on which the authorities at SHAPE lay understandable stress. If NATO forces withdrew from Germany they would have to be sited in the Low Countries and in France. If we assume that these comprised eight divisions and two tactical air forces, with all their supply services, they would total about 400,000 men. It is not simply that the expense involved would be enormous: it is questionable, state the spokesmen of SHAPE, whether under peacetime conditions the land could be found for the barracks, the supply depots, the airfields, the living quarters and above all the vast areas needed for realistic training under conditions of modern war. In this respect the NATO forces in Germany have been remarkably lucky in having at their disposal the exceptional facilities built up for the Wehrmacht under the Nazi regime, and it would be difficult to recreate

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them west of the Rhine. U.S. commanders indeed have expressed doubt whether their forces would be able to remain in Europe at anything like their existing strength. Doubts of this kind are perhaps partly due to the very natural reluctance of men who have spent nine years in creating a complex and expensive organization to contemplate dismantling their creation and going through the whole business again. If eight divisions are going to be impossible to place, where did they propose to put the fifty divisions visualized in 1952? But the difficulties cannot be discounted; and if the United States withdraw say, half their troops, the remaining NATO forces, deprived of their German element, would be capable of very little. Barely twelve divisions would be left; if the French remain involved in Algeria, considerably less. The West would thus be the more strongly tempted to call in the Strategic Air Command to implement its guarantee to the Central Zone, although doing so would be to risk total mutual destruction. The Russians would need only to proceed by limited and ambiguous measures, no one of which would be worth countering by such terrible retaliation, but with which the weakened forces of NATO would not be competent to deal. The West has shown itself in the past somewhat reluctant to fulfil the guarantees it has offered in Eastern Europe even when the consequence was only conventional war. In the atomic age this reluctance to risk destruction for 'a far

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away people of whom we know nothing' can be expected only to increase. Guarantees are useless unless backed by armed forces readily available and suited to the immediate purpose, as well as by the unquestionable determination to use them.

The military disadvantages to the West of a disarmed zone in Central Europe thus seem overwhelming, and it is hard to see how such a settlement could improve the chances of lasting peace. On the contrary, unless one could be assured that the states within this zone would be unprecedentedly stable, both in their mutual relations and their internal affairs, and that the Russians would make no attempt to foment and exploit their difficulties, the danger would be increased of the West being forced, for lack of any other counter to Russian penetration, to unleash for a limited and local object global and thermo-nuclear war.

6

An Armed Central Zone

WHAT, however if the Central Zone is regarded not as a military vacuum but as a buffer – not as an Austria but as a Switzerland?

Here again we must visualize an international guarantee for all frontiers, the maintenance of early-warning installation in the area by both East and West, and a system of international inspection to ensure that the area was kept free of all nuclear weapons and perhaps of conventional weapons above a certain size. The frontiers of such an area could be protected by fortified zones; its population organized as a national militia; and its regular armed forces consist of mobile and strongly-armed units with their own close-support aircraft.¹ The organization would, in fact, approximate to that urged by Colonel von Bonin, which the Blank office rejected so decisively in 1952.

First, what if this area consisted simply of a

1. It would be a matter of considerable controversy whether these forces should have their own tactical atomic weapons or not. Possession of them would clearly add to their military effectiveness, but there are strong arguments in favour of confining their possession to NATO and Russian forces; first in the interests of general disarmament and secondly to keep the decision to *use* them firmly in the hands of the great powers.

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reunified Germany? The political drawbacks here are obvious. Germany's late enemies, both East and West, would feel cause for disquiet at her re-emergence as a military power independent of East and West and in a position to bargain with both – and with the Polish frontier problem giving her something worth bargaining for. The Germans themselves would probably feel even more uncomfortable. Twenty Russian divisions would still be posted on the Oder, and not all the promises of U.S. air support could atone for the fact that only a dozen or so NATO divisions were available beyond the Rhine. The requirements of neutrality would make it difficult, if not altogether impossible, for the German military authorities to carry out the preliminary joint planning needed to make any NATO intervention effective. Finally such a position would impose a crushing responsibility on any German Government. If it were weak the country would lie open to Russian infiltration and subversion, and no quantity of armed forces could keep Germany from being a dangerous centre of cold war. An aggressively self-confident and nationalist regime on the other hand would create friction of a different and no less dangerous kind. It is hard to see how any solution which left a neutral Germany, whether armed or disarmed, in immediate contact with Russia would be satisfactory for the Germans, the Russians, or anyone else. On this point the Germans themselves seem all but unanimous.

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Next we come to the proposals of Mr Gaitskell and Mr Healey for a central area consisting of Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and perhaps other East European states, armed with their own conventional forces. The size of such forces, in addition to militia units, could be very respectable. A reunified Germany might raise sixteen divisions, Poland fifteen, Hungary seven and Czechoslovakia ten. NATO could, if necessary, come to their aid with, say, ten divisions, with air support, and with intermediate-range ballistic missiles. How far could this combination of forces fulfil the role which NATO is performing today?

If we neglect all consideration of morale and politics and look at the question in a purely military light, the reply must be favourable. Given the internal stability of these states there would be little opportunity for Russian infiltration or *coups de main*: such forces would be able, given the political will to do so, to deal with anything less than massive overt aggression without calling on NATO at all. If the Russians wished to commit overt aggression against such a belt, they would need to concentrate a force considerably greater than their existing twenty divisions and thus make their intentions clear. Even against such an attack the defending forces, with NATO support from beyond the Rhine, should be able to hold their ground long enough for American air support to take effect. They might indeed, with the help of atomic

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airstrikes against Russian forces and lines of supply, make it unnecessary for strategic attacks against the heart of Russia to be launched at all, unless Russian measures made it essential. We are admittedly comparing a perfect ideal which it would take many years to achieve with an imperfect reality which it will be difficult to change; but in military terms alone such a scheme seems to have many advantages over the situation as it at present exists.

But even in military terms alone certain problems would be difficult to resolve. What liaison would exist, in peacetime, between the forces of this Central Zone and SHAPE? Could staff talks be held to determine the precise nature of the aid which NATO would render in case of Russian aggression, on the lines of the talks held between Britain and France before the two world wars? If so, talks would presumably have also to be permitted between the Central Area and the U.S.S.R. Such arrangements might be made, but 'security' would disappear in the process. If they were not, the relationship between NATO and the Central Area would resemble that between France and Britain and Belgium in 1914 and 1940: not an encouraging example. Effective aid can rarely be rendered to the victim of aggression unless preparations have been made long in advance and are continually brought up to date; and such constant examination would require some form of joint planning organization which would be difficult to reconcile with the neutral

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status of the central area. The Russians would view it with very reasonable suspicion; and the West would look on any similar body which the central powers might set up with the Russians with a mistrust even more profound. Even such staff talks as this are hardly adequate to the needs of modern war. The experiences not only of the Second World War but also of the First showed that nothing short of a completely integrated command can function in the speed and complexity of twentieth-century warfare. Mr Healey has suggested that NATO support should consist primarily of air and missile weapons, yet the difficulty would still remain. Procedure for target selection and indication, map-references, wireless procedure and codes, the use of airfields and servicing of aircraft, all would have to be settled well in advance. If NATO support did take this form, certainly two difficulties would be solved: that of accommodating NATO divisions west of the Rhine, and that of moving them forward through a curtain of Russian interdiction bombing. In terms of morale, however, no amount of support bombing, however accurate and well-prepared, is likely to compensate the Germans for the absence of allied forces from the West fighting with them on the ground.

How, secondly, would the forces of this central area be organized in relation to each other? There seem to be three possibilities. The first, and in military terms the most effective, would be a close

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alliance between national forces on the pattern of NATO, with a common plan, a common command and a standardized infrastructure of supply and communications. Such a system, however desirable in purely military terms, would possess one obvious political drawback. The alliance would almost certainly be dominated by Germany. The tireless industry of her people, the predominance of her industrial structure and resources and her traditional military ability, all would give her a well-deserved preponderance little less than that enjoyed by the United States in NATO. Such a preponderance would be doubtfully welcome to the states of Western Europe, while the rulers of Russia would have every excuse for seeing in it the revival of an historic threat to their western frontiers. Hitler's *Grossdeutschland* would have appeared again. Least of all is such an organization likely to be welcome to the states of Eastern Europe, however great the contribution to their military efficiency. The chances are that they would prefer the second possibility: complete control of their own forces and a system of alliances which involved no abdication of authority to a common supreme command. But the military value of such an arrangement would be negligible: such a system of defence was discredited in 1914. An alliance of this kind would be the target for persistent Russian attempts to nullify it by playing on its members' mutual jealousies and suspicions. Any guarantee given by NATO to the

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individual states would be of most doubtful military value. It is one thing to go to the help of a powerful and integrated alliance capable itself of considerable resistance; it is quite another to help effectively a small power whose neighbours have been bribed or intimidated into neutrality and which would probably be overrun in a few hours. In such a case NATO would have the choice of acquiescence in a *fait accompli*, or of intervening with atomic weapons in a rescue attempt which might be unwelcome even to the victims.

The third possibility is an integrated military organization of the Eastern states – and if a political federation developed this would arise automatically – and a Germany quite distinct yet bound by an alliance which did not involve any common command. Such a dual Central Zone would help solve the problem of preliminary planning, for Germany could hold open staff-talks with NATO while Eastern Europe did so with the Soviet Union. It would also safeguard the economic and political links between Germany and Western Europe which have been so laboriously forged over the past ten years, and which could be maintained only with difficulty if Germany did become part of any closely integrated Central European Treaty Organization. Admittedly such a solution would not be totally satisfactory to either side. The West could object that it perpetuated the Warsaw Pact under another form and provided the Russians with endless

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opportunities for interference in Eastern Europe. The Russians could say much the same about NATO's relations with Germany. But there would be certain definite advantages to both sides. Germany would be reunified. She would retain her close links with the West, as Dr Adenauer insists, yet be an independent power under an international guarantee as the Social Democrats demand. She would be militarily neutral, separate from NATO and armed only with conventional arms, as the Russians desire. Russian troops would leave Eastern Europe, but Russian planners would keep sufficient contacts there to ensure that these states really furnished a defensive glacis against any possible Western attack. Mutual military arrangements between Germany and Eastern Europe would guarantee that any conventional attack would meet with a formidable and united conventional resistance; NATO would be on hand to provide tactical air support if necessary; and SAC would be a last reserve, to be used only when it was absolutely clear that nothing short of thermo-nuclear holocaust would keep the Russians from overrunning Western Europe.

The success of such an arrangement would depend on three conditions. First, the German-Polish frontier would have to be finally settled, and there is little prospect of this in the immediate future. Until it is, the issue will remain a source of festering suspicion, impeding any real agreement

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between Germany and the East-European powers. Secondly the states of Eastern Europe would have to be able to maintain their stability and independence in the face of indirect Russian attempts to control their policy; and if they are unable to do so the West will be powerless to help. Their cities might be as full as they are now of Russian trade delegations, technologists, cultural emissaries, and military missions. Their communist parties, like those of the West, would be in constant communication with Moscow. None the less the Poles, the Hungarians, the Czechs, the Rumanians, and the Bulgars would have to maintain their integrity as successfully as the Finns. Moreover the West will have to recognize the inevitable and legitimate Russian interests in Eastern Europe, and restrain the enthusiasts who would see, in the withdrawal of Russian troops, the opening of a new and promising battlefield in the ideological war.

Thirdly some acceptable formula must be found for the settlement of the East German question, without which a reunited Germany, neutral or otherwise, is clearly impossible. The West, including both major political parties in this country, is pledged to support the selection of a new all-German Government by free elections to be held throughout Germany; which would, it is universally agreed, result in the immediate overthrow of the East German regime. Dr Adenauer's government will consider nothing less: for them, to

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negotiate with Ulbricht is as unthinkable as it would have been for the Allies to negotiate with Hitler. But Russia is equally strongly committed to the support of her protégé: Marshal Bulganin is reported to have told Sir Anthony Eden on his visit to London in 1956 'I cannot go back to the Russian people and tell them that I have given East Germany away'. Thus all the Russian proposals for reunification, of which the most recent were outlined by Mr Krushchev to the editor of *Die Welt* on 7 February 1958, contain provisions to safeguard the institutions of the communist regime in East Germany, and demands for direct negotiation between the two German governments. But even if such provisions were accepted and written into a treaty – perhaps constituting East Germany as a communist *Land* within the Confederation – how could they be enforced against the overwhelming desires of the German people themselves? Russia will not withdraw her forces without some assurance that the communist regime will survive; but the only possible assurance is the presence of those forces. Until this contradiction is resolved both reunification and disengagement remain questions purely for academic speculation.

These are the political difficulties which must be overcome within the disengaged area. We must consider in addition those which might arise within the area of NATO itself. Would the morale of the Western European states be adversely affected by

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the reorganization of NATO? And could the United Kingdom and the United States be relied upon to fulfil their guarantees to the Central Zone if they had no forces of their own in the immediate line of attack?

The first of these points is imponderable. A disengagement policy involving the demilitarization of Germany and the partial dismantling of Western defences might indeed be demoralizing, especially in states where communist influence is already strong; but the creation, not of a vacuum, but of a sizeable barrier of conventional forces giving at least some hope of a non-atomic defence might on the contrary have almost a stimulating effect. Western European opinion has after all shown considerable signs of disquiet at the development of a military policy which professes itself impotent to offer any effective defence of Europe except by unleashing thermo-nuclear war, and this disquiet made itself strongly felt at the NATO Heads of State Conference in December 1957. A likelier fear as we have seen is that of a reunified, rearmed and powerful Germany; but if that is really a disadvantage to the West we are wasting our time in discussing reunification at all.

The second point, that of the effectiveness of an American and British guarantee to a disengaged area, is one of far greater importance. It is not simply a question of whether we would keep our promises: it is a question also of whether our allies

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and our enemies *think* we would. Without Anglo-Saxon troops on German soil, it is argued, the Russians might be tempted to risk a gamble, and the Germans, feeling exposed and abandoned, might make what terms they could to save themselves from devastation. This is perhaps the most powerful of all arguments for the maintenance of the *status quo*. But its effectiveness depends largely on the nature of NATO strategy. So long as we can only intervene to support our allies by unleashing a full-scale atomic war in which the United Kingdom at least would be virtually destroyed, they have every reason to suspect that we might flinch when the test came, and no number of ministerial reassurances will remove those suspicions. The presence of Anglo-Saxon troops in the front line from the very beginning would quite certainly be necessary to ensure immediate 'massive retaliation'. But in the strategy visualized on page 70 above, 'massive retaliation' would not be immediate: it would be an *ultima ratio*, in third line behind the conventional forces of the Central Zone and the air and missile support, directed against 'tactical' targets, of NATO. America and Britain could come to the aid of the Central Zone without the immediate certainty that in doing so they would be committing suicide: and that would do much to make their guarantees more convincing. Yet even when all this is taken into account, we are still left with the fact that a weak Anglo-American force in

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Europe is a far more effective deterrent to Russian aggression than a German-Polish force ten times the strength. It has, indeed, been powerfully argued that any attempt to make retaliation seem less immediate and overwhelming would tempt the Russians into taking risks in order to gain piecemeal successes on the cheap. To argue the point would lead us too deeply into the complex question of limited war and graduated deterrence. Here it is enough to say that if we accept the doctrine of immediate massive retaliation, the conclusion follows that the withdrawal of Anglo-American troops from the front line in Europe would, by weakening the guarantees given by Britain and the United States, imperil the whole structure of Western strategy: but if we believe that with strong conventional forces, and perhaps low-yield atomic weapons, a more flexible strategy is possible, the presence of such troops in the front line becomes a matter of less vital concern.

7

Withdrawal from Europe

So far we have kept within the limits of the 'Gait-skill Plan' and considered merely the disengagement of NATO forces from Central Europe and their withdrawal to the Rhine. Now we must turn to the proposals of Mr Kennan and Sir John Slessor: that America and Britain should withdraw all save token forces from Europe altogether, leaving its ground defence to the armed forces of the continental powers.

The first disadvantage that comes to mind is one not so much for the defence of Europe as for the entire strategy of 'deterrence'. At present the effectiveness of the deterrent – that is, of the threat of American thermo-nuclear power – depends on the certainty of that power being brought into play against the Russian homeland in the event of Russian aggression. That certainty depends on the impossibility of the U.S. retaliatory forces being eliminated by a surprise 'Pearl Harbour' blow; and that impossibility depends on those forces being able to operate from such a multitude of bases around the perimeter of the Soviet Empire that to eliminate them all at once by such a blow would be entirely out of the question. If American withdrawal from Europe meant the evacuation of her

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air bases and missile sites in the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and the Near East, it would by reducing the number of alternative bases increase the chances of such a blow securing a reasonable degree of success.

This advantage, however, is likely to dwindle in importance as the West develops two major weapons in its armoury of deterrence: intercontinental ballistic missiles which can be launched from the recesses of American territory, and nuclear powered submarines bearing 'Polaris' missiles with a range of some 1,500 miles, launchable from anywhere on or under the high seas. It will still be desirable for the United States to keep their overseas bases as well: their shorter range makes possible greater accuracy, and their existence increases the Protean nature of the deterrent. In any case they cannot be relinquished until the new weapons become available in adequate quantities, which may easily not be for the best part of a decade. But the time may come when the Americans decide that these bases, vulnerable both because of their immobility and their contiguity to the Soviet Union, are no longer essential elements of the deterrent but expendable outposts which could be traded against similar concessions by the U.S.S.R.

It is also argued that if the Americans withdraw from Europe the morale of the Europeans would collapse. Whatever guarantees were given it would be concluded that America had relapsed into her

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traditional isolation. Even if this were not so, the only means by which she could intervene to protect Europe against Russian tanks, should European forces fail to halt them, would be by using thermo-nuclear weapons; which in view of the vulnerability of her own cities she might well hesitate to employ. Even if she were prepared to use them, Western Europe might prefer Russian occupation to 'liberation' by annihilation. Moreover an American, or rather an Anglo-American withdrawal from the Continent might have the same disastrous effect on communist policy as did the withdrawal from Korea, even if the United States covered their withdrawal by the most explicit guarantees. It might tempt the Russians into an adventure which they as well as their adversaries would have good reason to regret.

We have considered such arguments in relation to a withdrawal from Germany. They are strong, but they would be yet stronger if NATO strategists admitted that they had any chance of defending Europe anyhow without unleashing global war. There is no way of assessing the argument that our morale would collapse without the presence of American troops: their absence does not appear to worry such states as Sweden and Switzerland, and their presence is not considered an unmixed blessing by public opinion in NATO countries. NATO might survive as a political and economic organization and so assure an abiding American interest in

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Western Europe which would both preserve the political and economic health of the European powers and make more convincing the American guarantees. Moreover, a compromise scheme is not unthinkable whereby the United States retained their bases in, say, the United Kingdom and Spain, both for their strategic deterrent, for tactical support of NATO with aircraft and missiles, and as a visible guarantee of their good faith. The Northern, Southern, and Naval Commands of NATO would then remain virtually intact. The danger of 'accidental' war developing from minor outbreaks would be guarded against, as Sir John Slessor points out, by the presence of the strong conventional forces of the continental powers.

But when we consider the nature of these forces, two further disadvantages become apparent. They would have to be considerably stronger than they are at present, which would throw an increasing burden on the respective national economies; and secondly they would almost certainly need to be armed with their own tactical atomic weapons if they were to fill the gap left by the withdrawal of American and British troops.

The first of these conditions is not likely to be acceptable to France, Benelux, Italy and Germany, whose economies have been substantially subsidized by the contributions which Great Britain and the United States have been making, through NATO, to their defence; while as for the second,

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if the Russians had visualized that American withdrawal from Europe would involve not only reunifying Germany but also rearming her with atomic weapons, they might have urged the scheme with less enthusiasm. Indeed it must be noticed that any settlement involving an American withdrawal from Europe and the reunification of Germany is likely to mean that Germany will dominate Western Europe and probably contend with Russia for the domination of 'liberated' Eastern Europe as well. We would not list this necessarily as a disadvantage; but it is a factor to be very carefully weighed.

* * *

From this examination the following conclusions emerge. No scheme involving any sort of demilitarized central zone, or involving the neutralization of a reunified Germany, whether armed or not, seems either likely to provide the minimum safeguards for the West or to decrease international tension. Any scheme involving the total evacuation of Europe, including the United Kingdom, by the United States, if undertaken during the next ten years will make it necessary to reshape the entire strategy of the West; and though a partial evacuation might be militarily acceptable, it is likely to have deleterious effects both on Western Europe's economy and on her internal balance of power. There remains the Gaitskell-Healey plan, for a central area consisting of Germany and the states

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of Eastern Europe, possessing strong conventional forces; and on purely military grounds there is much to be said in its favour, not only as safeguarding western security but in offering a hope of doing so with a reduced danger of global thermonuclear war. But the political difficulties and disadvantages of such a scheme seem, on examination, to be far more considerable than its protagonists have as yet admitted, and they would have to be carefully balanced against the disadvantages of the existing situation before the West could put it forward as a *bona fide* proposal for a settlement.

8

The Russian Attitude

WHAT finally, is the Russian attitude to the question? How far can we expect any agreement to be reached which will adequately guard the vital interests of both sides?

In weighing the pros and cons of disengagement, it will be remembered, we have not been considering it as a weapon in the cold war, designed either to embarrass the Russians or to gain us prestige with the 'neutrals'. The various schemes only have value in so far as they give hope of a settlement genuinely acceptable to, and therefore likely to be loyally observed by Russia as well as the West. It has been suggested that Russia might be forced to accept a disadvantageous settlement by some internal embarrassment, such as might arise either from an over-stretching of her economy or from trouble with the satellite states; trouble, it is further suggested, that could be intensified by Western propaganda in favour of disengagement. Apart from the element of wishful thinking in such a doctrine, it would hardly produce any relaxation of tension. If the Russians *were* forced to accept a measure of disengagement which they felt as a defeat, they would work continually to overthrow it; and the opportunities for such work in a disengaged area,

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would be, as we have seen, only too rich. The result would not enhance the prospects of a lasting peace. Thus it is fruitless to endorse any proposal which is not likely to command the serious consideration of the Russians. Here we mean not the Russians of our dreams, who have abandoned all hopes of world conquest and wish only to relax in perpetual peace, nor the Russians of our nightmares who are plotting imminent and ruthless military aggression; but Russians who have decided that a relaxation of world tension will both ease difficulties at home and make easier the spread of communism, in peaceful competition with liberalism, abroad; and who are prepared to make reasonable sacrifices – against comparable sacrifices by the West – to secure it.

There are three reasons why Russia should wish to retain her hold on East Germany and the states of Eastern Europe: military, economic and ideological. Of these the economic can now be eliminated. The exploitation which characterized Russian post-war regimes in these countries has everywhere been virtually abandoned – the political difficulties to which it gave rise were far too great. Germans, Poles, and Hungarians, by open resistance or the threat of it, all in turn forced the Russian occupation authorities to adopt a more conciliatory regime, with the result that these occupied territories are now economic liabilities rather than assets – a liability increased by the growing Russian shortage of man-power. But the territory of Eastern Europe

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is still of vital military significance to Russia. From the present 'Iron Curtain' in Germany to the Russian frontier is a distance of five to six hundred miles. This serves as a buffer against Western invasion with conventional troops as well as a spring-board from which Russian forces can menace the West; and it keeps American bomber and missile bases at a respectable distance from the heart of Russia. The most pacific and defensively-minded Russian strategist would have good reason to object to so useful a *glacis* being abandoned without very solid guarantees that these territories would not pass into enemy hands. Provisions for neutralization, demilitarization and rigorous international inspection might provide such guarantees, but such a solution would require a relaxation of international tension and a measure of agreement over complex questions of procedure for which at present it seems optimistic to hope. Russian military authorities might indeed prefer the more conservative solution of allowing these states to possess their own armed forces, so long as they themselves retained a sufficient degree of liaison to ensure that these forces were able to fulfil their role as a buffer, and to be able to aid them effectively in case of attack. It would anyhow be unrealistic to suppose that the Russians would ever withdraw troops from Eastern Europe without making arrangements of this kind. Such liaison, as we have seen, could be provided for within the framework of the Gaitskell-Healey

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plan. A Russian attack on Western Europe would certainly become a more difficult matter, and the Russians appear to consider this a vital part of their global war strategy. Whether they would feel it necessary to continue to do so is an open question. But it would still be possible. It would have to encounter new difficulties of supply and communication over poor roads, and thus be more vulnerable to interdiction bombing; it would encounter the additional resistance of East-European forces; but it could be mounted under conditions of far greater secrecy than would be possible with existing Russian dispositions, when every movement can be watched by Germans and Poles.

Thus the Russian strategist, like his Western counterpart, might report to his Government that a withdrawal of Russian forces to their own frontiers need not involve a diminution of national security, so long as the political situation in the Eastern European States remained stable and their Governments friendlily disposed towards the Soviet Union. But if the withdrawal of Russian troops opened the way to capitalist infiltration and subversion, he would add, disengagement might prove a fatal step.

It is when we consider the political and ideological aspects of Russian control of Eastern Europe that the greatest difficulties arise. As yet the Russians have never abandoned a communist satellite. When in the past they have yielded ground,

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as in Austria and Azerbaijan, the territory they gave up had not had a new political regime imposed on it: it had been under purely military control. To acquiesce in the overthrow of a communist regime would involve accepting a blow to the central doctrine of communism: the irreversible and inevitable nature of the historical process by which the capitalist system is bound to crumble and the dictatorship of the proletariat lead to the classless society. Marxist theologians could no doubt explain the matter as skilfully as they explained the transition from 'war communism' to the New Economic Policy in 1921, but one may wonder how much weight such explanation would carry among the sceptical and pragmatic generation which seems to be arising in Russia today. The less secure the Russian leaders feel, the less likely they are to make concessions: we are not the only people who like to negotiate from strength. However skilfully and bloodlessly conducted, any de-communization of Eastern Germany is going to appear as a gigantic defeat for the cause of communism and as a blow to the prestige of the Kremlin both at home and abroad. Even if the Kremlin were compelled to accept such a defeat – and at present there is no reason whatever why it should – it would not be likely to accept it as final; and world tension as a result would be in no way relaxed.

The only way in which the Russians could be brought to make, *bona fide* and permanently, a

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concession of this magnitude would be for the West to make one which would in Russian eyes appear equally great. It is hard to see this equivalent in a military withdrawal simply from a Western Germany which is in its attachment to the Atlantic Alliance *plus royaliste que le roi*. The Russian proposals for disengagement visualize, as we have seen, only two possibilities: a disengagement of Germany alone, with a political settlement which would leave the institutions of East Germany intact; or else, by stages, a total evacuation of Europe by Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

At present therefore the only proposals for disengagement which Russian statesmen have put forward are precisely those which the West can least afford to accept; while that which the West might well adopt without forfeiting its military security the Russians, less on military than on political grounds, would find it extremely hard to stomach. This is not to say that an acceptable compromise between the two positions is entirely out of the question; but it does mean that any negotiation which may take place over disengagement are likely to be as lengthy, as frustrating, and as productive of misunderstanding and ill-will as the ill-starred discussions over disarmament. And only if this is understood from the beginning should negotiations be undertaken at all.

9

Conclusion

OUR arguments seem thus to have brought us to an *impasse*. The difficulties in the way of achieving any measure of disengagement and the drawbacks of all the possibilities examined might well make us abandon the whole conception in despair. But if we do, what remains? The surrender of Western Germany is unthinkable, the surrender by the Russians of substantial communist areas, with no equivalent concessions by the West, is not practical politics nor ever likely to be; and we are left, discouraging as it may seem, with the acceptance of the status quo.

What are the grounds for supposing that the existing situation is intolerable? First, that Germany cannot remain indefinitely divided without an armed outburst resulting sooner or later. Secondly, and for the same reason, Eastern Europe cannot be permanently enslaved to a regime detested by the bulk of her people. Finally, confrontation of military forces in Europe is resulting in an arms race – of which the dissemination of atomic weapons among European powers is the latest and gravest symptom – which may sooner or later end in catastrophe.

The weight of the first two arguments depends, as we have seen, not simply on the degree of tension

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already existing in Europe, but on the tensions to which any alternative settlement is likely to give rise. The frying-pan is hot, but where will we land if we jump out of it? If we did so, would we not only weaken our defence but find ourselves involved in yet more urgent dangers? Certainly the strongest arguments against change are at least as much political as military. The military disadvantage can be over-estimated. NATO is not, in its present or in any foreseeable form, either the perfect or the best conceivable form of military organization. The Gaitskell, the Healey, even the Bonin plans might indeed provide something better. Nor can we accept the idea that the morale of Western Europe necessarily depends on the survival of NATO in its present form. In 1949 it was as salutary for Europe as a plaster cast for a broken limb; but now Western Europe may be judged to have recovered sufficiently from the *malaise* of the immediate post-war years for this dressing to be replaced by something more flexible. Indeed the continuation of the existing NATO structure, with its increasing proportion of nuclear weapons and all the consequent problems of internal politics in which they involve its member states, may lead to a degree of friction positively harmful to the interests of the West.

But NATO must not be identified simply with the organization of that Central Area with which this report has been almost exclusively concerned.

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Disengagement on this front need not involve the dissolution, or even the major modification, of the Scandinavian or Mediterranean theatres, much less of the naval commands, and American co-operation in these areas, as well as in the economic activities of the alliance, would remain as essential as it is today. NATO has acquired the massive inertia of a great international organization, solved its initial problems, and settled into a satisfactory rhythm of work. There can be no question of scrapping it; and disengagement does not necessarily involve doing anything of the kind.

Yet we cannot conclude that disengagement would by itself, even if the Powers could agree to it, do much to ease the political tensions of Europe. The Iron Curtain is a result of the world's *malaise* and not its cause, and no re-deployment of forces is likely to give more than the temporary and deceptive relief experienced by a sick man restlessly changing his position in bed. The mounting military tension between the two blocks arises not from any local European friction, but from a basic conflict of ideologies and the nature of the armaments themselves, and it can be allayed only by general measures of disarmament, mutual inspection and international control. Measures of local demilitarization such as those proposed by Sir Anthony Eden in 1955 or M Rapacki in 1957, perhaps offer more immediate hopes of relaxing world tension than does disengagement, which will raise immense

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political difficulties even in its most modest form.

Such demilitarization is naturally unwelcome to those who find the *status quo* intolerable and who view any attempt to make it tolerable with profound mistrust. But such an attitude is doubtfully wise. Peace does not consist in the absence of international problems: rather it lies in a general willingness to accept such problems, take them not too tragically and to rely on time and good will to soften their sharp edges even if not to solve them. Measures of disarmament which do not disturb the political *status quo* may offer surer if less spectacular means of reducing tension than would disengagement of any kind: but if these measures involved some degree of disengagement as well the West should consider them no less sympathetically. German reunification and Russian withdrawal from Eastern Europe are likely to be secured only gradually if at all, in successive stages and as the result of maturing confidence and mutual tolerance between East and West. To believe that they can of themselves bring such a *détente* about is to attach an exaggerated weight to the importance of the European sub-continent in the world today. It is hardly to be expected that a settlement can be reached in Europe so long as more dangerous rivalries in Asia and the Middle East continue to feed the mutual suspicions of the Great Powers. Conversely only a *détente* in these far more troubled

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areas, or a general agreement on nuclear disarmament, could create an atmosphere in which disengagement in Europe would become a practical possibility. It seems impossible to hope for a settlement in Europe as an isolated act. It can only come, if it comes at all, as part of a far wider adjustment of interests, a slackening of tension on a world-wide scale. Meanwhile we must accept the situation as it stands, hope for better days, and not be afraid of change when those days come. Disengagement is not an infallible recipe for disaster – any more than it is for a more lasting peace.

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